



OFFICE *of the* ATTORNEY GENERAL
GREG ABBOTT

May 1, 2003

Mr. John Feldt
Assistant District Attorney
Civil Division
Denton County
P.O. Box 2850
Denton, Texas 76202

OR2003-2933

Dear Mr. Feldt:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 180794.

The Denton County Criminal District Attorney's Office (the "D.A.'s Office") received a request for "a certified copy of all documents or records" concerning a certain criminal cause. You claim that the requested information is excepted from disclosure under sections 552.101, 552.103, 552.107, 552.108, 552.111, and 552.130 of the Government Code. We have considered the exceptions you claim and reviewed the submitted representative sample of information.¹

Initially, we note a document in the submitted information is information contained in a public court record. *See* Gov't Code § 522.022(a)(17) (providing that information contained in a public court record is public information). Therefore, as prescribed by section 552.022 of the Government Code, the D.A.'s Office must release this public court record to the requestor, unless it is confidential under other law. Section 552.108, a discretionary

¹ We assume that the "representative sample" of records submitted to this office is truly representative of the requested records as a whole. *See* Open Records Decision Nos. 499 (1988), 497 (1988). This open records letter does not reach, and therefore does not authorize the withholding of, any other requested records to the extent that those records contain substantially different types of information than that submitted to this office.

exception under the Act, does not constitute "other law" that makes information confidential. *See* Open Records Decision No. 586 (1991) (governmental body may waive section 552.108); *see also* Open Records Decision No. 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions generally). Accordingly, the D.A.'s Office must release the document we have marked under subsection 552.022(a)(17) of the Government Code.

You cite to subsection 552.108(a)(4), and, in connection with your assertion of attorney work product, you argue that because the Requestor seeks the D.A.'s complete criminal case file, the information is excepted from disclosure in its entirety pursuant to the holding in *Curry v. Walker*, 873 S.W.2d 379 (Tex. 1994) (discovery request for district attorney's entire litigation file may be denied because decision of what to include in file necessarily reveals prosecutor's mental impressions or legal reasoning). Section 552.108 reads in pertinent part:

(a) Information held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime is excepted from the requirements of Section 552.021 if:

(4) it is information that:

(A) is prepared by an attorney representing the state in anticipation of or in the course of preparing for criminal litigation; or

(B) reflects the mental impressions or legal reasoning of an attorney representing the state.

(c) This section does not except from [required public disclosure] information that is basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime.

We agree that the records request encompasses the prosecutor's entire case file. *Curry* provides that the release of the information would reveal the prosecutor's mental impressions or legal reasoning. Accordingly, except as otherwise noted in this ruling, the D.A.'s Office may withhold the prosecution file pursuant to subsection 552.108(a)(4)(B) of the Government Code.

However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime. Gov't Code § 552.108(c). We believe such basic information refers to the information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle Publishing Company v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.--Houston [14th Dist.] 1975), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976). Thus, the D.A.'s Office must release the basic information.

In summary, with the exception of basic information and the public court document, the D.A.'s Office may withhold the remainder of the file pursuant to section 552.108 of the Government Code.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular records at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other records or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For example, governmental bodies are prohibited from asking the attorney general to reconsider this ruling. Gov't Code § 552.301(f). If the governmental body wants to challenge this ruling, the governmental body must appeal by filing suit in Travis County within 30 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.324(b). In order to get the full benefit of such an appeal, the governmental body must file suit within 10 calendar days. *Id.* § 552.353(b)(3), (c). If the governmental body does not appeal this ruling and the governmental body does not comply with it, then both the requestor and the attorney general have the right to file suit against the governmental body to enforce this ruling. *Id.* § 552.321(a).

If this ruling requires the governmental body to release all or part of the requested information, the governmental body is responsible for taking the next step. Based on the statute, the attorney general expects that, within 10 calendar days of this ruling, the governmental body will do one of the following three things: 1) release the public records; 2) notify the requestor of the exact day, time, and place that copies of the records will be provided or that the records can be inspected; or 3) notify the requestor of the governmental body's intent to challenge this letter ruling in court. If the governmental body fails to do one of these three things within 10 calendar days of this ruling, then the requestor should report that failure to the attorney general's Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. The requestor may also file a complaint with the district or county attorney. *Id.* § 552.3215(e).

If this ruling requires or permits the governmental body to withhold all or some of the requested information, the requestor can appeal that decision by suing the governmental body. *Id.* § 552.321(a); *Texas Dep't of Pub. Safety v. Gilbreath*, 842 S.W.2d 408, 411 (Tex. App.—Austin 1992, no writ).

Please remember that under the Act the release of information triggers certain procedures for costs and charges to the requestor. If records are released in compliance with this ruling, be sure that all charges for the information are at or below the legal amounts. Questions or complaints about over-charging must be directed to Hadassah Schloss at the Texas Building and Procurement Commission at (512) 475-2497.

If the governmental body, the requestor, or any other person has questions or comments about this ruling, they may contact our office. We note that a third party may challenge this ruling by filing suit seeking to withhold information from a requestor. Gov't Code § 552.325. Although there is no statutory deadline for contacting us, the attorney general prefers to receive any comments within 10 calendar days of the date of this ruling.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert F. Maier". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Robert" and last name "Maier" clearly distinguishable.

Robert F. Maier
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

RFM/seg

Ref: ID# 180794

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Ms. Barbara Martin
Flynn, Campbell & Francis
700 East Southlake Boulevard, Suite 150
Southlake, Texas 76092
(w/o enclosures)